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EUROPEAN FAIRYTALE: ONCE UPON THE HERE & NOW by Kathryn Hixson



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“VIEWFINDER” by Elizabeth Pence

artUS 20 WINTER 2007

Henry Art Gallery, Seattle WA July 14 · December 30, 2007



Now that photography is centuries old and dominates every facet of cultural, scientific, and personal life, do our human eyes even see the same way anymore? This is the question posed by “Viewfinder” curator Sara Krajewski, who has selected 35 artists from the Henry collection to mark the museum’s 80th anniversary. Arranged into groupings of “Frame,” “Focus,” “Exposure,” “Parallax,” “Camera-less”

man lying prone on the sidewalk, and a group of people obscured by heavy steam pouring from an overheated car. Details continue to mount the longer one looks ahead as if through a viewfinder.

The most commanding photography is still the product of precise framing and editing, admirably represented here by Amir Zaki, Kori Newkirk, Rachel Harrison, Sergio Prego, Esko Mannikko, and Sharon Lockhart. For instance, Amir Zaki’s *Untitled (Winter Pool 32)* (2004) presents a vertiginously framed

derelict pool turned a rich, transparent green, awash with tendrils of grime and debris. From his “Spring Through Winter” series, here Zaki searches the cultural landscape for transformative or eye-altering digital processes. Likewise, Sharon Lockhart’s large color triptych *Enrique Nava Enequina: Oaxacan Exhibit Hall, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City* (1999) features a laborer repairing the museum’s stone floor behind a glass partition separating him from the public, just like the artifact vitrines in the background. Who or what is exactly on display is the question the camera alone is able to pose.

Grouped together under “Focus” are works by Paul Seawright, Uta Barth, and Clegg & Guttman. Barth’s pivotal three-panel *Untitled (98.5)* (1998) offers an atmospheric, overcast view of the countryside, as if one was looking through a picture window. In fact, the left-hand frame reveals the bar of a sliding window, partially explaining the various degrees of murkiness of what we never exactly see—epitomized by the blank gap in the middle of the set. Devoid of precise identification or detail, this blurry prospect is the generic space of non-place, which we inhabit as the eye/I of the photographic juggernaut.



and “Voyeur,” this show considers how visual artists frame their interventions through manipulations of photography’s conventional forms and practices.

Opening the show is Oliver Boberg’s *Landstrasse (Country Road)* (2002), a 30-minute-long static video projection of a dark and stormy suburban stage set. The DVD, positioned among still photographs, finds a compelling echo in the flattened stillness of its frame. A solitary tree and house offer the nearest thing to narrative relief, but nearly everything else, when viewed against an unrelenting monochromatic field, exists more or less as graphic elements: the vertical sheets of rain, rectangular hedge, curbside, and other lines of flight leading enigmatically into the darkness. Alternatively, Nic Nicosia’s *Middletown* (1997) virtually brims over with pointless action. A kind of *Carnival of Souls* road movie set to manic Mr. Whippy music, the video comprises a continuous tracking shot that winds endlessly through an uncurbed Dallas suburb, scoping out along the way two men in business suits and cowboy hats sauntering along the road, a



(TOP TO BOTTOM) UTA BARTH, UNTITLED (98.5), 1998, COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS ON PANEL. COURTESY THE ARTIST & TANYA BONAKAR GALLERY, NEW YORK. OLIVER BOBERG, LANDSTRASSE (COUNTRY ROAD), 2002, DVD PROJECTION. COURTESY THE ARTIST & DCKT CONTEMPORARY. AMIR ZAKI, UNTITLED (WINTER POOL 32), 2004, ULTRACHROME ARCHIVAL DIGITAL PRINT. PHOTO RICHARD NICOL. COURTESY HENRY ART GALLERY, SEATTLE.